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WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Preparatory Committee
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AGENDA, RULES OF PROCEDURE, DATES, DURATION, VENUE OF AND PARTICIPATION AT THE WORLD CONFERENCE

PREPARATORY MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES AT THE INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

STUDIES AND OTHER DOCUMENTATION FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE

Summary of the discussions on the World Conference on Human Rights at the forty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights

Note by the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights at its forty-seventh session

Introduction

1. The present note has been prepared in accordance with the recommendation of the Commission on Human Rights, contained in paragraph 6 of its resolution 1991/30, that the Chairman of the Commission make available to the Preparatory Committee a summary of the discussions on the World Conference that took place at the forty-seventh session of the Commission.

2. The forthcoming World Conference was discussed at the Commission during its 22nd to 25th meetings and at its 52nd meeting, held on 22-25 February and 5 March 1991. In addition, reference to the World Conference was made in

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the statements of high-ranking dignitaries at its 5th, 29th and 36th meetings, held on 31 January 1991, 18 February 1991 and 21 February 1991 respectively. 1/

3. The subject was introduced in a statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights at the 22nd meeting.

4. Statements 2/ were made during the debate on this question by representatives of the following members of the Commission: Australia (23), Austria (24), Bangladesh (22), Belgium (23), China (22), Cuba (23), Czechoslovakia (25), France (23 and 36), Germany (23), Hungary (29), India (24), Iraq (25), Italy (24), Morocco (23 and 52), Panama (23), Peru (24), Philippines (24), Portugal (23), Senegal (25), Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (24), United States of America (22 and 52).

5. Statements were also made by observers for the following Government delegations: Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (25), Denmark (on behalf of the Nordic countries) (22), Greece (24), Ireland (24), Luxembourg (5 and 24), Spain (24), Syrian Arab Republic (25), United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (23), Zambia (25).

6. A statement was made by the representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (23).

7. Statements were also made by representatives of the following non-governmental organizations organizations: American Association of Jurists (23), Four Directions Council (25), International Centre of Sociological, Penal and Penitentiary Research and Studies (23), International Committee of the Red Cross (24).

8. Intensive informal consultations took place during the session. The relevant resolution, 1991/30, and its annex containing recommendations addressed to the Preparatory Committee, are appended to the present document.

Approach

9. During the debate on the Conference, many speakers expressed their wholehearted support for the Conference and indicated their willingness to participate in the process of preparing for, as well as the actual holding of the Conference, in a spirit of cooperation. It was suggested that the Conference should provide an opportunity for the international community to undertake a hard, honest self-assessment, avoiding polemics by adopting a pragmatic approach which should be guided by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Many speakers also stressed that the evolution in the human rights activities of the United Nations since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had made it imperative for the debates in the World Conference to take the latest developments into consideration. It was further suggested that the debates should favour a long-term perspective and should not focus unduly on the present.

Preparatory process

10. A number of speakers stressed the need for participation in the preparatory process leading up to the Conference to be as broad as possible. In that regard, speakers emphasized the importance of regional activities in promoting regional cooperation.

Method of work

11. It was suggested that the preparations for the Conference, in particular the sessions of the Preparatory Committee, should be undertaken in a spirit of consensus. The Sub-Commission was requested to present a note on the Conference to the Committee. It was further suggested that the rules of procedure of the Preparatory Committee should be those of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. It was reiterated that the Preparatory Committee should decide on the agenda for the Conference and suggested that country-specific debate should be avoided.

Themes to highlight

12. It was suggested, on the one hand, that the Conference should concentrate on civil and political rights, and on the other, that the focus should be on economic, social and cultural rights. A number of speakers, however, emphasized the universality of human rights. Another issue which speakers sought to have emphasized was the question of development. Some suggested that there was a link between the enjoyment of human rights and development, whilst others suggested that development was itself a right which should be highlighted. Other issues included the increased role of popular participation, national and regional institutions and training and technical assistance in the promotion and protection of human rights.

General aims

13. It was suggested that the Conference could serve as a powerful tool for the promotion and protection of human rights and would present an opportunity for States to renew their commitment to the universal promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Many speakers shared the view that one of the most important tasks facing the Conference was an assessment of progress in the universal enjoyment of human rights and the obstacles hindering the achievement of this goal. It was felt that an assessment of the role of United Nations bodies and mechanisms and the implementation of international standards would also be relevant. It was suggested that the international community should concentrate on the effective implementation of existing standards rather than on the elaboration of new rights. To this end, existing human rights instruments and mechanisms should be streamlined. It was further suggested that both the theory and practice of human rights should be debated and that dialogue and transparency should be encouraged in the field of human rights. The hope was expressed that the Conference would give a new impetus to the teaching of human rights.

Specific aims

14. Speakers expressed the wish for a final document from the Conference which would take the form of a proclamation. Such a document would contain, inter alia, an acknowledgement and application of the lessons learned during the "human rights revolution" of the 1990s.

15. A number of concrete measures were called for, including recommendations for closing the gap in the levels of development between the North and the South, recommendations for ending the politicization of human rights debate in United Nations forums and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of United Nations machinery, including the provision of increased financial resources for the Centre for Human Rights.

Notes

1/ See documents E/CN.4/1991/SR.5, 22-25, 29, 36 and 52.

2/ The numbers in brackets refer to the meeting during which the statement was made. A detailed record of each statement is contained in the summary record of the relevant meeting.